

## **“Chick-Lit” Revisited: Bridget Jones Meets *Jessica, 30*.**

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### ***Synopsis***

In this paper, I read Streeruwitz’s 2004 novel *Jessica, 30*. in the context of the “chick-lit” genre. As any Google search will demonstrate, the term chick-lit is generally used to refer to Helen Fielding’s 1996 bestseller *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, its sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, and Bridget’s successors such as Sophie Kinsella’s “Shopaholic” series and the works of Marian Keyes and Anna Maxted, among others. When used in this sense, chick-lit refers to “modern literature for women - that is written about late twenty and thirtysomething singles (aka singletons) as they search for the perfect partner” (“What is Chick Lit?” n.p.). This type of chick-lit is often written with a first person narrative and a “confessional” tone, and is seen “to appeal primarily to the women readers who can recognise themselves within [its] pages” (Whelehan 29).

The term chick-lit, however, predates *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and was originally used as a title for an anthology of experimental women’s fiction published in 1995. One of the co-editors, Cris Mazza, defines her use of the term chick-lit as “fiction that transgressed the mainstream or challenged the status quo” (Mazza “Chick Lit & Perversion” 33), or “alternative fiction” with a “non-commercial or non-traditional narrative” (Mazza “Editing Postfeminist Fiction” 108).

The characteristics of Streeruwitz’s title character (her age, the precarious job with a woman’s magazine, the married boyfriend, jogging to work off the “Schoko-Maple-Walnut Orgie” (Streeruwitz 20) from the night before, etc.), combined with Jessica’s breathless inner monologue seem at first to align *Jessica, 30*. with the popular form of chick-lit. Compare, for example, the following excerpts from *Jessica, 30*. and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*:

. . . Alles wird gut, ich muss nur die Praterhauptallee hinauf- und hinunterrennen und dann ist wieder alles gut, dann kann ich das Schokoeis von heute Nacht und das Essen von Weihnachten vergessen und dass ich nicht geschlafen habe, wegen dem Gerhard, obwohl ich das gar nicht will und es gar keinen Grund gibt, den so ernst zu nehmen, aber beim Laufen dann, dann brauche ich an nichts zu denken (Streeruwitz 5).

But then I do think New Year's resolutions can't technically be expected to begin on New Year's Day, don't you? Since, because it's an extension of New Year's Eve, smokers are already on a smoking roll and cannot be expected to stop abruptly on the stroke of midnight with so much nicotine in the system. Also dieting on New Year's Day isn't a good idea as you can't eat rationally but really need to be free to consume whatever is necessary, moment by moment, in order to ease your hangover. I think it would be much more sensible if resolutions began generally on January the second (Fielding 13-14).

In both novels, the narrative is in the first-person and presented as a type of "direct feed" from the protagonist's consciousness. There are, however, important stylistic differences between the two texts that suggest that Streeruwitz's text may rather need to be classified as "chick-lit" in Mazza's sense (e.g., as a text with an "alternative" non-commercial narrative structure). And indeed, Streeruwitz's use of punctuation in *Jessica, 30.* (specifically the lack of periods) does place her text squarely in the "chick-lit as alternative fiction" camp. Textually, then, Streeruwitz's novel alternates between the two type of chick-lit. A close reading of narrative strategies in *Jessica, 30.* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* demonstrates the ways that *Jessica, 30.* conforms to and deviates from both types of chick-lit.

In conclusion, I address the question of feminism, "postfeminism," and their relation to chick-lit and Streeruwitz's text. For if Mazza's anthologies and popular chick-lit are clearly labeled and received as "third wave" or "post"-feminist fiction (albeit with drastically different definitions of the terms third wave and postfeminism), Streeruwitz has always claimed allegiance to a feminist project that can best be defined as belonging to the second wave of feminism. As Streeruwitz put it, describing her first novel *Verführungen*, "Man weiß [. . .] nicht, wie das

private, das heim-liche Leben aussieht. Das ist für Frauen, die ja immer ins Private abgedrängt werden, das Politische. Man muß ihnen eine Stimme verschaffen” (Quoted in Schreckenberger 136). With Jessica, however, Streeruwitz created a character who embodies the “post-*Brigitte*-Generation,” a.k.a. a third wave or “post”-feminist. The tension that arises from the combination of a postfeminist title character (Jessica) and form (chick-lit) with the author’s second wave sensibilities results in a text that reveals the tension between second and third wave feminisms, especially in the final chapter, which depicts Jessica’s evolution from the “Ally-McBeal-Klon” (Streeruwitz 21) of the first chapter to a revenge-seeking critic of patriarchy who links the Iraq war to male sexuality:

aber die letzten Kriege haben die sexuelle Repression wieder instand gesetzt, mit diesem Krieg jetzt, da wird die Prüderie zurückgeholt, der ist ein Ventil wieder, der ist die Entlastung vom nächtlichen Funktionierenmüssen im Bett, damit schlagen die Männer wieder zurück [ . . . ] wenn einer den Schwanz nicht hochkriegt [ . . . ] da gehen sie lieber in den Krieg, als zu einem date (Streeruwitz 225).

If the Jessica of the first chapter is a model postfeminist Bridget-type “child of *Cosmopolitan* culture,” (Fielding 52) the Jessica of the third chapter embodies an “older” anger, that of the *Brigitte* generation. In this respect, *Jessica*, 30, can be defined as chick-lit (in both senses) insofar as it reflects the tensions between feminism’s waves.

### ***Optional Materials***

*Jessica*, 30.

“Körper, Karriere, Koitus” in *Freitag*: <http://www.freitag.de/2004/32/04321402.php>

“Sie und ihr Maple Walnut: Mit ihrem neuen Roman *Jessica*, 30. tut Marlene Streeruwitz Frauen keinen Gefallen” in *FAZ* on Bücher.de:

[http://www.buecher.de/verteiler.asp?site=artikel\\_faz.asp&wea=1100485&artikelnummer=00001382937](http://www.buecher.de/verteiler.asp?site=artikel_faz.asp&wea=1100485&artikelnummer=00001382937)

“Trotz und verletzte Eitelkeit” in *Titel*: <http://www.titel-forum.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=2627>

Literaturhaus Review: [http://www.literaturhaus.at/buch/buch/rez/streeruwitz\\_jessica30/](http://www.literaturhaus.at/buch/buch/rez/streeruwitz_jessica30/)

“Plastikmädchen” Article and Interview: <http://www.plastikmaedchen.net/stories/402/>  
<http://www.plastikmaedchen.net/stories/403/>

*Chick-Lit (Experimental)*

The cover of the 1<sup>st</sup> “Chick-Lit” anthology: *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction*:  
<http://fc2.org/chicklit/chicklit.htm>

Cris Mazza’s introduction to her 2<sup>nd</sup> “Chick Lit” anthology, *Chick-Lit 2 (No Chick-Vics)*:  
<http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr3/mazza.htm>

*Chick-Lit (Popular)*

Authors’ Guidelines from Red Dress Ink (Harlequin’s Chick-Lit imprint):  
<http://www.eharlequin.com/cms/learntowrite/ltwArticle.jhtml?pageID=021101wu20001>

“Don’t Hate Me Because I’m Cute” in *Baltimore City Paper*:  
<http://www.citypaper.com/special/story.asp?id=5973>

“Chick Lit 101” in *Baltimore City Paper*: <http://www.citypaper.com/special/story.asp?id=5972>

“Eight Reasons Why Chick Lit Authors Should Be Kicked Until They’re Dead”:  
<http://www.numberonehitsong.com/archives/001463.php> (a Jelinek-type rant against chick-lit)

**Works Cited**

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Mazza, Cris. “Chick Lit and the Perversion of a Genre.” *Poets & Writers* 33.1 (January/February 2005): 31-37.

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Schreckenberger, Helga. “Die ‘Poetik des Banalen’ in Marlene Streeruwitz’ Romane *Verführungen* und *Lisa’s Liebe*.” *Modern Austrian Literature* 31.3/4 (1998): 135-47.

Streeruwitz, Marlene. *Jessica, 30*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2004.

“What is Chick Lit?” <http://www.chicklit.us/whatiscl.htm>. Accessed: September 25, 2005.

Whelehan, Imelda. “Sex and the Single Girl: Helen Fielding, Erica Jong and Helen Gurley Brown.” *Contemporary British Writers*. Ed. Emma Parker. Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2004, 28-40.